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LENT 3

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March 07, 2021  
Anglican Parish of Raymond Terrace  
[www.stjohnsraymondterrace.org](http://www.stjohnsraymondterrace.org)

## LENT 3 - 07 MARCH 2021

Pray:

May I speak to you in the name of GOD – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen



Exodus 20 is a climactic moment in Israel's history. After the call of Moses (Exodus 1-6), the plagues (7-11), the celebration of the Passover (12 & 13) and their eventual escape from slavery in Egypt (14 & 15), GOD leads His people through a number of adventures to the foot of Mount Sinai (16-19). Through Moses, GOD announces the standards (called 'words' – better known as the 10 Commandments) by which they will live their lives as His people. They are not just rules and regulations. Chapters 21-23 record an unsystematic collection of other laws and the rest of the book outlines norms for proper worship.

It is crucial to remember that obeying the law does NOT make them GOD's people. They are GOD's people because GOD Himself chose to make them His and to

bring them out of slavery (Exodus 20: 1-3). That is why He must be the only object of their worship (vv4-7). It all starts with GOD, not what they must do. It is GOD who will make a lasting covenant with them in due course (ch. 24). The fourth commandment equally ties the day of rest to GOD's action as creator – not because they needed a rest! The fifth commandment explicitly connects respect for parents with GOD's promise of the land. The 5 remaining commandments are to characterise their behaviour towards each other.

Psalm 19 – like Psalm 119 which is at much greater length – celebrates the wonder of GOD's law. Some knowledge of GOD may be discovered in the creation (vv1-6) but knowledge of His moral perfection and beauty comes chiefly through His revealed Word. It revives and gives joy (vv7-8) and mediates truth (vv9-10). If believers know and obey GOD's law, they will not sin. The law is not a burden but a joy – something to be grateful for and enthusiastically studied.



We may find it easy to admire – even if we do not imitate – the compassionate JESUS – but an angry JESUS armed with a corded whip, driving traders and moneychangers out of the Jerusalem temple and overturning their tables, may shock us. This gospel does not actually use the word “angry”, but JESUS’ actions are played out against the backdrop of the ‘zeal’ of Psalm 69:10, and the burning passion of the psalmist for GOD and the house of GOD, the Temple, that Mark places in the mouth of JESUS. This is the zeal that will consume JESUS in the hot noon of Calvary.

The cause of JESUS’ anger is not so much the money exchange or animal trading in the outer court of the temple. Foreign coinage that bore pagan or imperial images could not be accepted for the half-shekel tax for the upkeep of the temple sanctuary; and so, it had to be exchanged for acceptable temple currency with which to pay this tax and also buy sacrificial animals. John writes that “the Passover of the Jews was near,” and so, those flocking to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast from all over

the Roman Empire needed to buy animals required for participation in the temple worship and the domestic rituals. They could do this most conveniently at the temple. JESUS is not unaware of the need for money exchange, nor so naïve as not to know that petty pilfering and profiteering can be involved in these transactions. Something much more radical is happening – the reclamation of the holy place from marketplace to His Father’s house – from empty, atrophied ritual to living worship.

By His “parable in action”, JESUS momentarily terminates the temple worship, reclaims it from chaos and commerce, and cleanses the privileged piece of creation that is His Father’s house of prayer. No doubt a few hours later the tables were again in place, animals led back in, coins exchanged – with plenty to talk about! Yet the disturbing JESUS does not disappear from the scene – He has more “table-turning to do. He stays to answer the criticism of His opponents who can see no further than the temple built over 46 years by human

hands – OR – who refuse to imagine or tolerate any alternatives to the religious practices and institutions that they consider faultless and unchangeable. In this, JESUS stands in the line of Hebrew prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, and Amos – who angrily and zealously denounced triumphalism and absolutism in worship. JESUS, too, will suffer the fate of so many prophets before and after Him – rejection, persecution, even death. JESUS dares to name Himself as the new and living temple in which the divine presence dwells. Ultimately, the sanctuary of His body will be destroyed in His passion and death, only to be raised again in 3 days. It is only after these events that His disciples will remember and understand JESUS' words.

The Church of today – our church – cannot consider itself beyond the reach of JESUS' whip or overturning hands. When Church leaders connive with unjust and tyrannical civil leaders, when fundraising takes precedence over faith-raising, when we refuse to tolerate or even imagine alternatives to religious practices and institutions – even

when some of these are obviously in the death throes – when nostalgia for past liturgical practice resists the leading of the Holy Spirit into the future, then church needs to be cleansed by prophets driven by the Spirit of JESUS. And like JESUS, these men and women may often be torn and destroyed – but ultimately raised up by Him. For us who are living stones in the temple of CHRIST’s body, Lent is also a time for cleansing the deep personal sanctuary of our hearts, for driving out of our lives whatever clutters our discipleship, blocks our ears to the Word of GOD and the prophets, and distracts us from trading justly and lovingly with the gifts GOD has given us.

In John’s gospel, JESUS’ cleansing of the temple is at the beginning instead of at the end, where the other gospels place it. We find within this account another revelation of who JESUS is as the true temple of the LORD – a temple that, even when destroyed, will be raised in 3 days.

After leading the people out of captivity in Egypt, Moses met GOD on Mount Sinai and is given the 10 Commandments. The first 3 of these commandments explore what we are called to in our relationship with GOD – while the following 7 lay out how we are to interact with other humans. To GOD we are called to give fidelity, reverence and also time. One day of the week is to be set apart in particular for worship and repose – the Sabbath Day. In ancient Israel the temple was the privileged place of encounter with and worship of GOD and in His cleansing of it, JESUS claims it again as a place of fidelity and reverence where commerce, wealth, and greed have no place. How do we strive to “keep holy the Sabbath Day?”

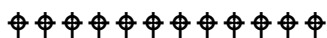
Members of the Verbum-Dei-Missionary-Fraternity think of it this way:

The author of today’s psalm speaks of GOD’s law as refreshment for our journey through life. The law of GOD revives the soul; it gladdens the heart and brings light to the eyes.



Do we think of GOD's law as refreshing? We can sometimes experience law as a burden imposed from without that restricts our enjoyment of life. Laws formulated by humans can have these characteristics but not the law of GOD. This law, expressed in the 10 commandments and in JESUS' Sermon on the Mount, reveals the wisdom and love of GOD for all. It is the law most true to our human nature. If we are faithful to this law we will be right with GOD and in harmony with our fellow human beings and all of creation.

The 10 Commandments were given by GOD to the people of Israel more than 3,000 years ago. They retain their validity and freshness. Not one commandment has reached its "use-by" date. To dispense with any of these commandments would be to impoverish humanity, indeed, to threaten its very survival. Yes, 'the precepts of the LORD are right – they gladden the heart.'



**May we pray:**

Son of GOD, you reveal yourself to us in ways we don't always recognise. Help us to discover your presence in our lives and to entrust more of ourselves to you – who live and reign with GOD the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one GOD, now and for ever. Amen.

Daily Prayer 2021

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